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Augusta National's Most Interesting (And Secretive) Details

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Hello, friends. The 89th Masters is officially underway. Back by popular demand, today's newsletter examines Augusta National's most interesting and secretive details.

I began assembling this list years ago, but I could have never imagined what it would become. This year's newsletter includes over 50 unique items, covering everything you could possibly imagine about golf's most iconic venue. That includes details about Augusta National's unique media rights deal, a sneak peek into the club's membership list and initiation fee, the club's $200 million real estate spending spree, and specific numbers about the revenue generated from merchandise sales and home rentals.

We also talk about the time that the Masters had to send Nike a cease and desist.

Today's newsletter is for paid subscribers only (because it takes me dozens of hours to put together, and that's what they pay me for). But if you have been considering upgrading your subscription, today is the day. I don't care how big of a golf fan you might be; this list is guaranteed to have several items you have never considered.

Enjoy the tournament (and feel free to take credit for these facts with your friends).

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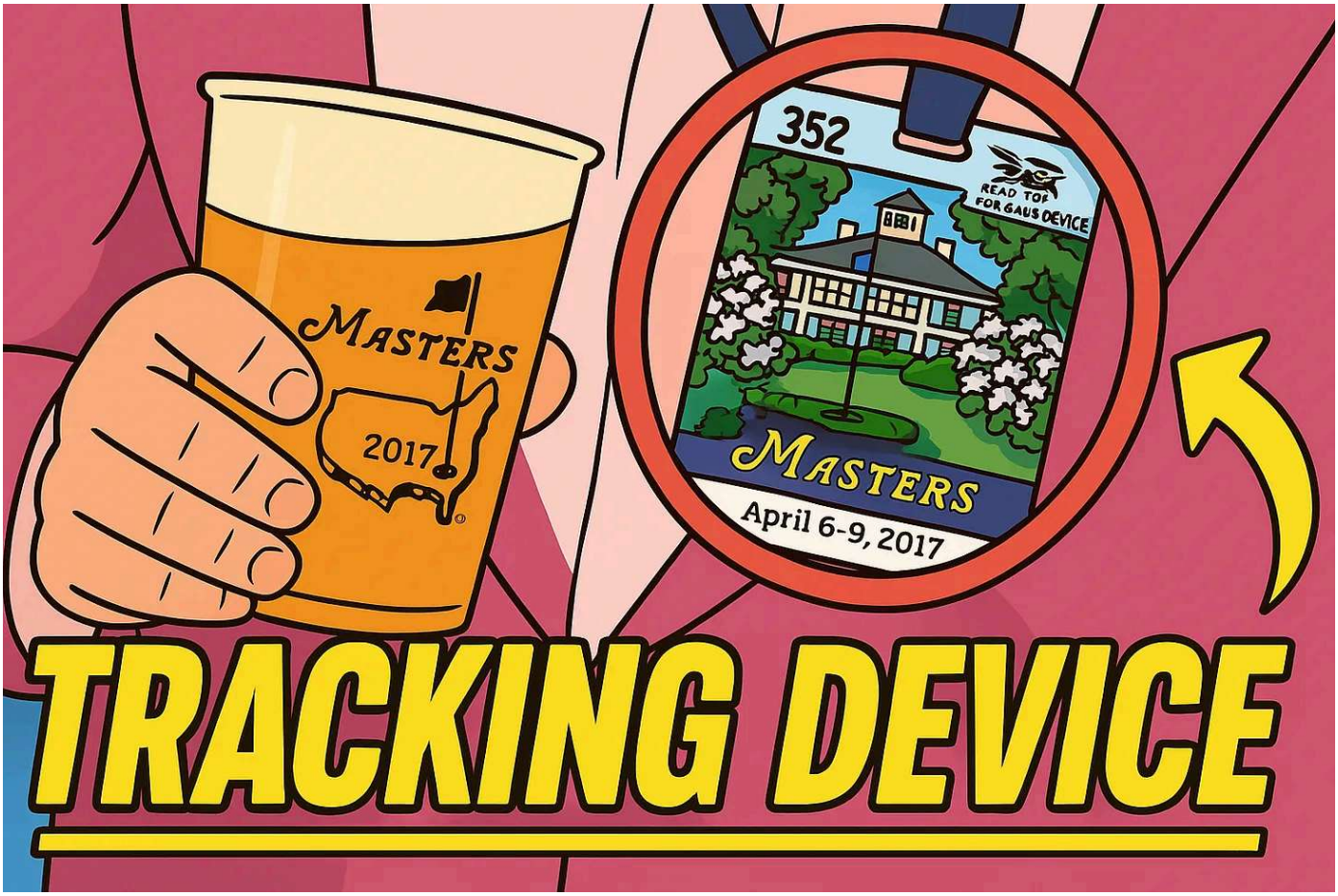

RFID Chips: Augusta provides each media member with a badge upon arrival. These badges get you access to the tournament and media center each day, but they also contain an RFID chip, allowing club officials to see where you're located at all times.

Media Rights: The Masters has the most unique media rights deal in sports. ESPN and CBS don't pay any money to broadcast the tournament. Instead, they simply invoice Augusta after the tournament to cover production costs. Augusta then forwards this invoice to their sponsors (AT&T, IBM, Mercedes-Benz, and Bank of America), who pay $5M+ each in exchange for 4 minutes of commercial time per hour.

Augusta probably sacrifices $100 million annually by doing it this way, but it allows them to control everything — from what the broadcasters say to what they show.

Commercial-Free by Principle: In 2003, Augusta National televised the Masters without commercials. The club faced protests over its all-male membership, so it

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shielded sponsors by absorbing the costs. The result? A TV broadcast of pure golf that drew 34.5 million viewers on Sunday, one of the most-viewed Masters finishes ever.

Privacy over Profit: Many of the world's nicest golf clubs operate as non-profits to save money on taxes. However, Augusta National is a for-profit corporation. This requires them to pay more taxes, but they do it anyway because it means they don't have to share their member list, income, holdings, expansion plans, or anything else.

Details Matter: Augusta National is incredibly precise with *everything* at the Masters. The fairways are cut to 3/8", and the greens won't be longer than 1/8". The grounds crew is so good that they can replace entire pieces of sod within 15 minutes and Magnolia Lane is exactly 330 yards long with 61 Magnolia trees on each side.

Augusta's $140M Practice Area: Augusta National spent $140 million building an 18-acre practice area, but it is only used 12 days a year. Previous champions don't even use it because their status awards them access to the members-only practice area.

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The Masters is also the only tournament that limits the number of people on the driving range. Each player can only bring their caddie and one other person. Some players opt for a swing coach, while others might pick their trainer or psychologist.

Practice Range Tracker: As part of the $140 million practice area, Augusta National has recently implemented technology that allows fans to track every shot from every player. The tech shows you the trajectory of every shot, including its carry, height, curve, ball speed, and launch angle. Some players are only hitting 25-50 shots a day, while Bryson DeChambeau spent six hours hitting nearly 400 shots on Tuesday. He was the last to leave the range (after 7 pm) and hit 146 more shots than anybody else.

Green Packaging: Everyone knows the Masters has cheap concessions — you can buy all 27 items for $77 — but what you may not know is that the food comes in a green wrapper similar to Augusta's grass so that it isn't noticeable on TV if a patron litters.

Beer Sales: Speaking of cheap concession prices, don't expect to buy beer until 11 am on Sunday. The previous rule was 12:30 pm — the idea was that no one would drink until church was complete — but the rule was pushed 90 minutes forward in 2020.

Augusta's Expansion: Augusta National Golf Club has spent more than $200 million over the last few years, acquiring 100+ properties and 270+ acres of land. Through an array of limited liability companies (LLCs), Augusta has purchased strip malls, restaurants, apartment complexes, and homes. The golf club often pays three to four times more than the properties' appraised value, and while some of this land has gone towards parking lots and hospitality venues, the rumor is that Augusta wants to build a second golf course and a private exit off the highway directly into the club.

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Map & Flag: Augusta National recently used some of its newly acquired land to open a premium hospitality offering called "Map & Flag." Guests receive a week-long tournament badge with all-inclusive food and drinks. There are dozens of TVs and a private merchandise shop to save people time. However, this is the best example of Augusta's pricing power. The venue isn't even at Augusta National — it's down the street in a renovated shopping center they purchased for $26 million in 2020 — yet Augusta can charge people $17,000 per ticket, and they sell out instantly every year.

Lottery Tickets: The Masters leaves a lot of money on the table with tickets. That's because rather than selling them to the highest bidder in the open market, Augusta selects attendees each year through a lottery system. It's estimated you only have a 0.55% chance of winning — I've applied every year for the last ten years and haven't won — and you don't get to pick which day you attend. But if you do get selected, you'll save a lot of money, as daily passes purchased through the lottery cost $100 to $140, while daily passes on the secondary market will often cost more than $2,500.

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Sneaky Elevation: Augusta is much hillier than it looks on TV. The clubhouse is 320 feet above sea level, while Rae's Creek in Amen Corner is 190 feet. That's an elevation difference of 130 feet, with the most noticeable difference coming on the 110-foot descent from tee to green on the 10th hole and the 90-foot drop on the 2nd hole.

Everyone Gets Paid: Unlike other tournaments, where players only get paid if they make the cut, everyone gets paid at the Masters. The winner walks away with $3.6 million of the $20 million purse, while players leaving on Friday get a $10,000 check.

No On-Course Advertising: You won't see any corporate logos at Augusta. There are no billboards, banners, or sponsored tee signs, and the concession stands list Coca-Cola as a generic "soft drink." Augusta does this to preserve its clean, pristine image.

Merchandise Sales: The Masters will do about $70 million in merchandise sales this week alone. That's $10 million per day, $1 million per hour, $16,000 per minute, or $277 per second that the store is open. The reason this number is so high is that Augusta National artificially increases demand by only allowing people to buy official merchandise on-site (i.e., no online sales). This creates enormous lines, and it's common to see people pay thousands at checkout, buying items for family and friends.

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Home Rentals: Homes in Augusta, Georgia, command ridiculous rates during the Masters. Five-bedroom homes rent for $30,000 to $70,000 for the week, and brands like Nike (or billionaire attendees) often pay six figures for larger homes to host events.

The Augusta Rule: The IRS has a special exemption in its tax code commonly referred to as "The Augusta Rule." This rule allows homeowners to rent out their primary homes for 14 days per year without paying taxes on the income. It was initially implemented for Augusta residents only, but now covers everyone in the United States.

Augusta's Membership Process: Augusta National's membership initiation fee is much lower ($40,000) than places like Shinnecock Hills or Los Angeles Golf Club ($300,000-$500,000). However, that doesn't mean anyone can join. Potential members must be nominated by a current member, and regardless of how much money you might have, if you publicly discuss wanting to become a member, you will be denied.

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Membership Rules: Augusta National has all the same rules you would find at a high-level country club, like backward hats. However, members are also prohibited from wearing shorts (regardless of the temperature). Tipping is also not allowed on the property, outside of caddies. There is no high-stakes gambling, and the club is so strict about lights on after midnight that they hold New Year's celebrations at 10:30.

Closed for the Summer: While many country clubs are most active during the Summer, Augusta National is closed from late May until October. There are no events, and members cannot play during this time. Instead, Augusta uses its offseason to reseed the grass and perform significant work for the upcoming Masters tournament.

Augusta's Membership List: While all 300 members at Augusta are not public, we know Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, Roger Goodell, Peyton Manning, Rob Manfred, Condoleeza Rice, and Stanley Druckenmiller are all members. Amazon CEO Andy Jassy, Delta Airlines CEO Ed Bastian, and Eli Manning were also admitted last year.

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The Green Jacket: Augusta's green jacket tradition started in 1937 when the club purchased jackets for its employees so that Masters visitors could easily find someone on the course with accurate information. Every Masters winner now gets a custom-fit jacket. The winner can take the jacket home for a year, but then they must return it to their locker in the clubhouse and can only wear it when they are visiting the property.

$5 to $140,000: In 1994, someone found a green jacket in a Canadian thrift store. They purchased it for $5 and later sold it at auction for $140,000. Not bad, not bad.

Numbers on Caddie Uniforms: You'll notice that all caddies at the Masters have a number listed on their jumpsuits. The defending champion is always given No. 1, but the rest of the numbers are handed out based on arrival time. So, if a player's caddie is wearing No. 50, he was simply the 50th player to check in that week at the tournament.

Lengthening the Course: With today's golfers focusing on driving distance and club technology limiting misses, Augusta National has dramatically increased its yardage to keep up with the modern game. In 1934, the course played about 6,800 yards, but many holes have been lengthened over the last 20 years, and it now plays 7,500 yards.

Mandatory Masters Lingo: Augusta National is very particular about the language used during TV broadcasts at the Masters. Fans are called patrons. The back nine is called the second nine. The driving range is known as the tournament practice facility, and the rough isn't called the rough; it's called the second cut. Mistakes rarely happen, but Augusta National isn't shy about reprimanding those who slip up on TV.

Private Jets: More than 1,500 private jets will land in Augusta this week for the Masters. These planes will come from all over the world — someone has already flown 14+ hours from South Korea — and they will pay upwards of $3,000 in landing and parking fees. New York, Palm Beach, and Dallas were the most popular incoming flights last year, while the shortest flight came from Aiken, South Carolina (20 miles), and the longest domestic flight traveled to Augusta from Eugene, Oregon (2,700 miles).

Courtesy Cars: Through a partnership between Augusta and Mercedes-Benz, all players competing in the Masters are given a Mercedes-Benz vehicle for the week,

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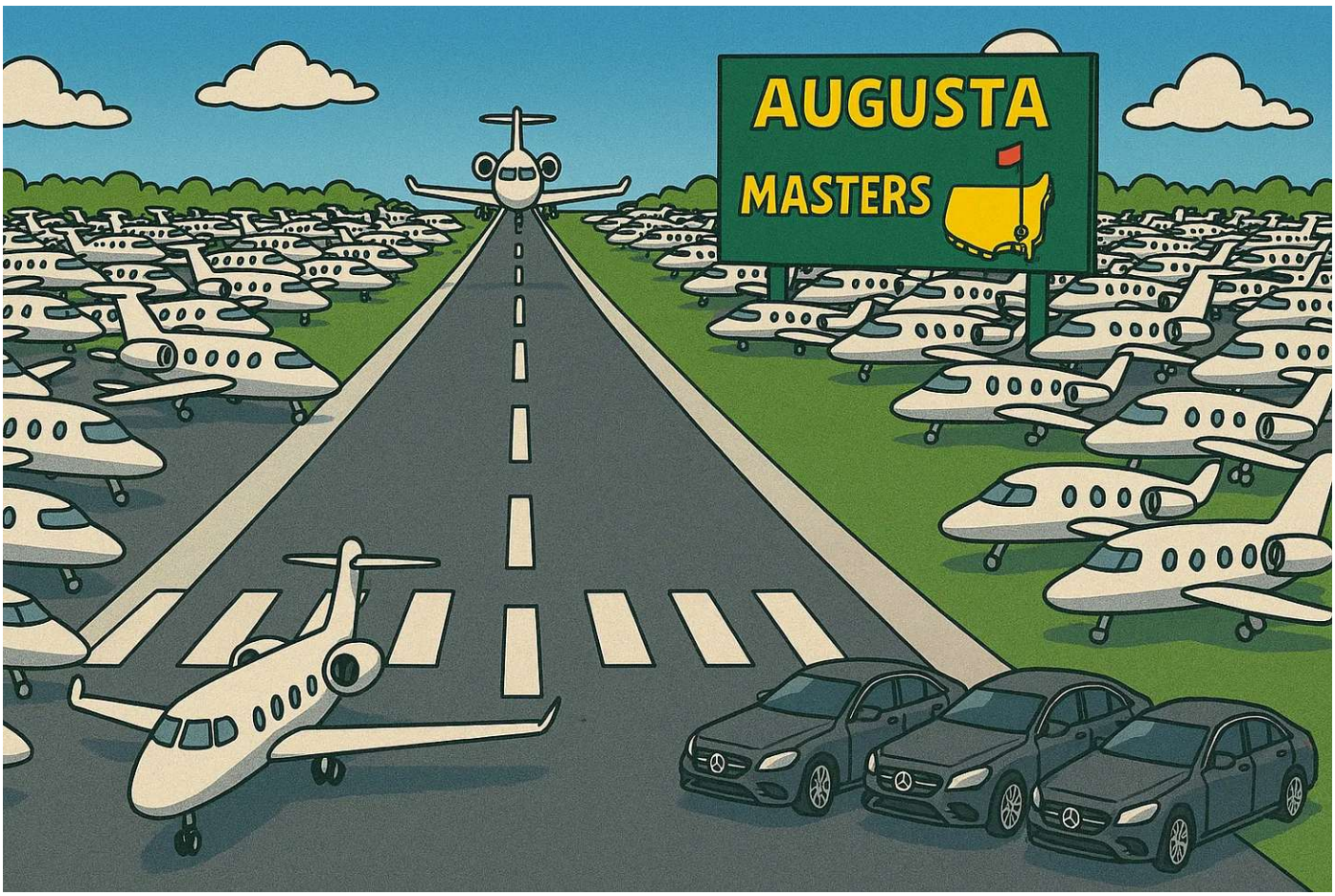
often an SUV or S-class sedan. These cars are waiting at the airport for their arrival.



Champions Locker Room: Every Masters winner receives a locker in the Champions Locker Room at Augusta National Golf Club. However, since the second-floor locker room only has 28 oak lockers, each locker is shared by at least two champions. Jordan Spieth has publicly talked about how special it was when he first walked into the locker room and saw that he would be sharing a locker with the late Arnold Palmer.

Picture-Perfect Ponds and Bunkers: It's estimated that Augusta National spends over $10 million annually on course maintenance, so it's no surprise that the grounds look perfect come tournament time. This preparation includes the obvious stuff, but it also includes adding food dye in the ponds so they look prettier on TV, and the course's 44 bunkers are filled with a heavier granulated quartz because of its ultra-white look.

Don't Steal The Sand: Speaking of Augusta National's unique sand, don't try to steal it. In 2012, a man named Clayton Baker tried to take some sand from a bunker home as

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a souvenir. He was chased down, arrested, and spent the night in jail. The charges were eventually dropped, but Baker says the situation cost him $20,000 in legal fees.

Sub-Air Systems: Augusta National has Sub-Air Systems installed beneath all its greens. This system of pipes and vacuums can make the greens tournament-ready within minutes, sucking moisture out after it rains or forcing fresh air into the soil when it's too hot. This isn't unique; many of the world's best clubs have Sub-Air systems. What is unique is that Augusta National installed them beneath all its walkways after a patron slipped and fell during the tournament a few years ago.

Champions Dinner: Everyone knows that previous Masters champions gather every year for dinner on the Tuesday before the tournament. The defending champion picks the food and wine, but what you may not know is that he also has to pay for the meal.

Wine Cellar: The Augusta National clubhouse has a wine cellar in the basement with 30+ pages of the world's most exclusive wines. Rory McIlroy says that the wine selection is "unbelievable" and that "the prices that the members pay for the wine is very reasonable compared to what it would be in restaurants and other places."

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Manual Scoreboards: Instead of electronic screens, all of the scoreboards at Augusta National are manually operated. Volunteers on each hole relay the results via radio, which are immediately updated by hand. Since there are no screens showing live replays, spectators wait in suspense for the leaderboard to be updated in big moments.

Media Monday: As a show of appreciation for how they cover the tournament, Augusta National allows media members to play the course on the Monday after the tournament. Not everyone gets to play — it's a random draw held among accredited reporters and photographers — but if you do get the call, it's a career highlight. This hospitality is also extended to the hundreds of volunteers that work the tournament.

Flower-Named Holes: Each of Augusta National's 18 holes is named after a plant or shrub that grows in that area of the course. So, rather than calling the 13th hole the 13th hole, it's known as Azalea because it's famously lined with 1,600 azalea bushes.

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100+ Trademarks: Augusta National currently holds more than 100 trademarks covering everything from the Masters name to some of the golf course's most unique features. And don't test Augusta because they will defend themselves no matter who you are, like the time Nike tried to release Augusta-themed golf shoes in 2019 with yellow and green praying hands as a nod to Amen Corner, only to cancel the retail release days before it was supposed to go live citing "unforeseen circumstances."

Eisenhower Cabin: Dwight D. Eisenhower is the only U.S. president ever to become a member of Augusta National. He never actually attended the Masters, but Eisenhower made 29 trips to the property, playing 210 rounds, during his eight-year term as president. Even better? The Secret Service worked with the club to build a safe place for him to stay, called Eisenhower Cabin, which is still used on the property today.

Ronald Reagan: Speaking of Eisenhower Cabin, one of Augusta National's craziest stories is President Reagan's 1983 vacation there. He stayed at the cabin since the Secret Service had already built it for maximum protection. But one day, when he was out on the course, a man smashed through the gate with a gun and tried to hold him hostage in the pro shop. The good news is that nothing ended up happening, as the Secret Service got Reagan out in an armed motorcade, and the suspect was arrested.

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